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COUNTER: Progress though Cooperation

by Peter T. Shepherd (Director, Project COUNTER) <pt_shepherd@hotmail.com>

"Yes, we must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately." — Benjamin Franklin

It is in the interests of both librarians and vendors that online usage statistics should be credible, consistent, and compatible. It is the object of **COUNTER** to ensure that this is so, without imposing an expensive bureaucracy on the industry.

There are many reasons why librarians need reliable online usage statistics. They can be used to support collection development, as well as a more informed allocation of funds. They are also useful for the development of new purchasing models, especially at the consortia level, that reflect more accurately the value of the publications purchased. Finally, knowing where usage takes place allows librarians to develop an internal marketing and promotion strategy that stimulates use of library services and materials.

Intelligent vendors now accept that they too will benefit in a number of ways from higher quality online usage statistics. It is in their interest to demonstrate that reduced usage of print issues has been compensated for by increased online usage. Now that content can reach customers by a variety of online channels, it is important for vendors to be able to assess the relative importance of these routes in order to develop the right partnerships, and on viable terms. Vendors must also react intelligently to customer pressure for new journal pricing models and need reliable usage data to develop new models. Vendors also need a better understanding of customer and user demographics and behaviour. And finally, vendors need usage statistics to support online product development, as well as the infrastructure that underlies these products.

At a time when budgets are tight, when better measures of the value of publications are being ever more fervently sought,¹ and when new, radical alternatives to the business models that have traditionally supported the scholarly publishing process are being proposed,² it behooves both vendors and librarians to devote resources to ensuring that the usage statistics they produce and consume meet an accepted standard.

Strategy

Since its launch in March 2002, **COUNTER** (Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources) has progressed only through

the active cooperation of the library and vendor communities. Realistic, if testing, goals were agreed at the outset, and progress toward these goals has been steady.³ This has, in large measure, been due to the strategy adopted by **COUNTER**, which has the following elements:

- **Buy-in from both the library and vendor communities:** both communities from the beginning have actively supported **COUNTER**, and there is balanced representation from both on the Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and International Advisory Board.
- **Start small:** the scope of Release 1 of the **COUNTER Code of Practice** has been confined to journals and databases, as these are the two most important online budget items for librarians. The scope of the **Code of Practice** will be extended in response to user feedback.
- **Start with the basics:** the usage reports specified in the **Code of Practice** deal with simple metrics that are within the grasp of all online journal and database publishers.
- **Compatibility is the goal, not sophistication:** it is important that as many publishers as possible are able to comply with the **Code of Practice**.
- **Be as prescriptive as possible in the Code of Practice:** this is important to ensure compatibility among different vendor usage reports.
- **Build on and cooperate with other existing organizations and initiatives:** notably the **ARL New Measures Initiative**, the **ICOLC Guidelines for Statistical Measures of Usage of Web-based Information Resources**, and **NISO Standard Z39.7**.
- **Supplement rather than substitute** existing, more sophisticated or product-related usage reports.
- **Provide support and advice** for vendors and librarians on implementation.
- **Give librarians confidence** in the quality of the data by setting standards for auditing that result in credible data without placing an undue burden on vendors.

Current Activities

Following the above strategy, **COUNTER** met its major objective for 2002, completion of Release 1 of the **COUNTER Code of Practice**, which was published in January 2003. Since then there has not only been much useful feedback from both vendors and librarians on its scope and content, but also publishers of online journals

and databases have been working towards compliance with it. Also, to ensure a stable, long-term organizational structure for **COUNTER** it has been set up as a not-for-profit company, **Counter Online Metrics**, based in England. A number of important objectives have been set for **COUNTER** for 2003; these are listed below, along with a summary of progress against each:

Objective 1: Promote and gain acceptance for the Code of Practice

During 2003 a huge effort has gone into making the vendor and library communities aware of **COUNTER** and the **Code of Practice** has already gained a broad measure of acceptance. In addition to information posted on the **COUNTER** Website (www.projectCounter.org), presentations have been given at a number of publishing and librarian conferences (listed on the **COUNTER** Website) and articles are being published in the major industry journals.

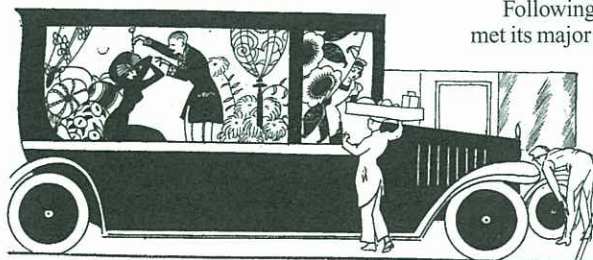
Objective 2: Obtain feedback on Release 1

We are obtaining feedback from librarians in a number of ways. First, via comments to the **COUNTER** Website, which has come through steadily since the beginning of the year. This feedback has included a number of useful suggestions for enhancement and improvements to be incorporated into the next release of the **Code of Practice**. The Executive Committee of **Counter** has reviewed these suggestions and has created a shortlist of upgrades that were tested on librarian focus groups in September, October, and November 2003. Among the suggested improvements for Release 2 of the **Code of Practice** are:

- Usage reports to be broken down by year of publication
- Usage reports to be broken down by type of access to the journal (subscribed/non-subscribed)
- XML Format for Usage Reports, to facilitate the merging of reports and consolidation of statistics from different publishers
- Deadline for reporting data to be extended from two to four weeks after the end of the reporting period. This is a more realistic deadline for most vendors
- Provide usage reports at the article level (in Release 1 the lowest level of reporting is at the journal level)
- Provide an additional Usage Report for journals that report full text html and PDF request separately
- Provide a toolkit that enables librarians to combine automatically the usage statistics from different vendor URLs

In addition to the above improvements to the **Code of Practice**, it has been suggested that **COUNTER** could provide training courses for librarians and vendors on the implementation of the **Code of Practice**.

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Op Ed — To Thine Own Self Be Dispassionate

by **Bob Schatz** (Director of Sales & Marketing, Franklin Book Co., Inc.) <everbob@yahoo.com>

Matt Nauman's thoughtful editorial in the September *ATG* raised many points worth considering. Exhibitions at major (and minor) conferences have real and substantial costs which can affect the finances of vendors. With that I agree. When it comes to **Matt's** suggestion that **ALA** and **BookExpo America** combine into a single annual conference, I remain dubious.

It isn't that the idea does not have merit. Those of us on the vendor side, and many librarians as well, have commented or complained for years that **ALA** seems to be the only professional organization that needs two major national conferences per year. And, as a result, we end up going to some rather daunting venues at odd times of year, because **ALA** can strike some good deals for using convention center services during non-peak seasons. The result, too frequently, is a poorly attended trade exhibit at great cost to our companies. **Matt** touched on those realities quite well in his piece, but some specifics may be worth examining.

Exhibits at shows like **ALA** are built around the rental of units of 10' x 10' space. Each of those units, just for the rental of the slab of concrete, runs around \$2,000-\$2,500. Adding carpeting and a few furnishings to said slab can easily add another \$1,000-\$2,000, more if you are also renting an exhibit backdrop. If you bring your own backdrop, there may be shipping and union labor set-up charges that can run another \$500-\$1,000. For larger booths used by bigger companies, you can multiply these charges to get an idea of their expense. You'll note, at this point nothing has been said about staffing the booth, which involves airfares and hotel rentals. Then there's entertaining, which many companies do over and above just exhibiting in the trade show part of the conference. In such a scenario, a small company can easily spend in excess of \$15,000 on a show, a large company \$75,000 or more.

Clearly (to me, anyway), **ALA** has no vested interest in walking away from the significant revenue stream that results from holding two national trade shows per year. No matter how rational the notion, there is no way vendors should expect that **ALA** will move to a single conference per year, with or without it being in conjunction with something like **BookExpo America**, no matter how good an argument is made by thoughtful guys like **Matt Nauman**.


To my mind, the real issue is whether we vendors can be dispassionate (or perhaps it is courageous) enough in the running of our businesses to actually skip some **ALAs**, instead of treating the twice-

yearly exhibition as sacrosanct and inviolable. Perhaps this is where smaller companies have an advantage; we have a longer history of picking and choosing shows at which we will have displays. For instance, **Franklin Book**, where I now reside professionally, attends and exhibits at **ALA** and a variety of law library, special library, and medical library shows, as well as regional and national conferences in Canada ... but not every single show nor every year. There are times when, in our collective wisdom, we feel that exhibiting at each conference may not make fiscal sense. Sometimes it has to do with the venue and the expected traffic. (We assume that an **ALA** in the middle of summer in Orlando will attract a very different attendance than, say, San Francisco.) Sometimes our decision is based on disappointing results from the last time we exhibited at a particular show. Sometimes the money saved allows us to attend a show we wouldn't otherwise be able to attend. The evaluation is complex and, admittedly, inexact (i.e., you never know when being at a conference will lead to a spectacular sale that would not otherwise have taken place.) But our viability as a business doesn't end just because we've made those difficult decisions, nor does our commitment to the library profession. Those important lessons are not lost on us, nor on the majority of our customers.

I perceive a certain amount of anxiety



among vendors when it comes to this particular discussion. Supported by very real events, we worry that customers will notice our absence at trade shows and draw hasty and damaging conclusions about our financial well-being, so we seek their permission to skip some shows in order to put those financial resources to other uses. Personally, I just don't think it is right for us to ask our customers to make those decisions for us; they have their own weighty issues to grapple with. Nor do I think we can expect **ALA** and other professional associations to let us off the hook. While our professional interests overlap, they are not identical, nor will they ever be.

The question **Matt** raised, "Are Two **ALAs** Too Much?" is a valid one. But the answer to the complex underlying questions that surround this issue lie not in our stars, dear Horatio, but in ourselves. If vendors are serious about resolving this issue for the long run, I believe we'll have to do so by changing our own behavior, and living with the associated risks. That's the nature of business. If we want to be relieved of the significant financial burden that comes with attending too many trade shows, let's do it by focusing on our own businesses and making the difficult decisions that will guarantee to our customers, our suppliers, our investors, and our employees that we'll be around for as long as it is economically feasible. 

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Objective 3: Define audit process and compile list of approved auditors

The **Code of Practice**, specifies the requirements to be met by data to be used for building the usage reports. A guiding principle is that only intended usage should be recorded, and all requests that are not intended by the user are removed. For example, all double clicks on an http link within ten seconds of each other will be counted as only one request. Where a PDF link is involved, this filter is set at 30 seconds, due to the longer time it takes to render a PDF. The proper application of these filters, along with the other specifications of the **Code of Practice**, will be subject to an audit from 2004. The audit process is now under development and will be implemented in 2004, once it has been fully tested.

Objective 4: Define and set up a permanent administrative structure

COUNTER was launched in March 2002 as a "project" supported by many companies and organizations in the library and vendor world. In 2002 and 2003 it was funded entirely by the generous sponsorship of these organizations. To provide **COUNTER** with the formal, legal structure it requires to go forward it has been incorporated in England as a not-for-profit company — **Counter Online Metrics**.

Under this form of company structure, **COUNTER** is owned by its members. Publishers, intermediaries, libraries, library consortia and trade organizations are all eligible for full, voting membership of **Counter Online Metrics**.

Annual membership rates for 2004 are: Publisher £500 (\$750); Intermediary £500 (\$750); Library £250 (\$375); Library Consortium £335 (\$500); Industry Organization £250 (\$375).

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The benefits of full COUNTER membership include:

- The right to vote at the Annual General Meeting on the direction and management of COUNTER, including the appointment of the Board of Directors
- Regular bulletins on the progress of COUNTER
- Advice on implementation of COUNTER
- For vendors, inclusion on the Register of COUNTER-compliant vendors at no additional charge (provided the vendor meets the auditing requirements for compliance.)

As a lower-price alternative to the above, non-voting affiliate membership is available to libraries at £100 (\$150) for 2004. Library affiliates will receive the regular member bulletins on the progress of COUNTER. An application form for Counter membership is available on the COUNTER Website (www.ProjectCounter.org).

Objective 5: Promote membership of COUNTER

Following incorporation of Counter Online Metrics in August 2003, we launched a campaign to attract all categories of members. By the end of October over 60 members had signed up, which means that we are already almost half way towards our target for the whole of 2004. The membership campaign will continue through 2003 and 2004. The more members we have, the more resources we can make available and the faster will be our progress towards extending to Code of Practice to cover more categories of content.

Objective 6: Widespread implementation by vendors for the 2004 subscription year


By publishing Release 1 of the Code of Practice in January 2003, we intended that this would allow vendors time to achieve Counter compliant status by the beginning of the 2004 subscription year. An up-to-date list of compliant vendors is provided on the COUNTER Website, but by October 2003, eight vendors (Annual Reviews, Blackwell, Elsevier, Gale, Oxford University Press, Portland Press, Swets Blackwell and Thomson ISI) and one supplier of online platforms (Atypen Information Systems) were compliant with Release 1. Many other vendors, including the American Institute of Physics, EBSCO, HighWire Press, and the Nature Publishing Group have declared their intention to be COUNTER compliant before the end of 2003.

Looking Ahead

Three major objectives have already been agreed upon for COUNTER in 2004.

First, we plan to publish Release 2 of the Code of Practice early in 2004 with a view to implementing it in January 2005. This means that Release 1 remains valid until January 2005 and will be the required compliance standard until then. Second, we will continue to build the membership of COUNTER, to ensure the initiative's long-term future. Third, the number of COUNTER-compliant vendors will be increased.

Counter Founding Sponsors

COUNTER is deeply grateful to its Founding Sponsors, listed at <http://www.projectcounter.org/sponsors.html>, whose generous financial contributions have enabled this project to commence its work. We salute their vision, commitment and support. 

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Into the Twenty-first Century: Leadership and the Future of Libraries

A Conversation with Robert Wedgeworth

by Victoria Beatty, MLIS (Special Projects Librarian, University of Washington Libraries) <vbeatty@u.washington.edu>
<http://faculty.washington.edu/vbeatty/>

Robert Wedgeworth is president of ProLiteracy Worldwide; former interim president and vice chairman of the Laubach Literacy International Board of Trustees; retired university librarian and professor of library administration at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; former dean of the School of Library Service at Columbia University; former executive director of the American Library Association (ALA); chairman of the Committee on Accreditation, ALA (2003-2004); former president of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions; trustee, Newberry Library, Chicago; trustee, Wabash College; board of directors, NY Center for the Book; advisory board, Syracuse University, School of Information Studies; initiated the organization of The National Coalition for Literacy; editor of two major reference works, *ALA Yearbook, 1976-1985* and the *World Encyclopedia of Library and Information Services*, 3d edition, 1993; co-author of *Starvation of Young Black Minds: The Effects of the Book Boycotts in South Africa*, 1989; A.B., Wabash College;

M.S., University of Illinois; five honorary doctorates, the most recent from William and Mary in 1988.

Victoria Beatty received her MLIS in June 2003 from the Information School at the University of Washington. She is currently Special Projects Librarian at the University of Washington Libraries. She has been studying the American Library Association's Library of the Future exhibit at the Century 21 Exposition, better known as the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. The exhibit, which was called *Library 21*, was meant to serve as a working model of twenty-first century library facilities and services. The exhibit's forward-looking designers predicted the integration of new technologies and a blend of library and information sciences that looks surprisingly fresh forty years later. Library leaders used *Library 21* as a catalyst for creating a new paradigm and setting a dynamic new course for the profession. Because the specially trained librarians who staffed the exhibit spread its message to an international network of colleagues, the exhibit had a much greater impact than its six-

month run during the Fair would indicate. Today, as our profession faces similar challenges, the accomplishments of those far-seeing people take on new meaning and inspire us to take up the torch that is passed.

This interview took place on May 12, 2003.

VB: You were one of the lucky librarians who staffed *Library 21*, ALA's Library of the Future exhibit at the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle. You had just graduated from library school and had your first job at the Kansas City Public Library. Is that correct?

RW: Yes. I had started in January 1961. I had just been there a little over a year, when the opportunity came to apply to the *Library 21* staff. My boss at that time was a former treasurer of ALA, and I got him to sponsor me as a candidate.

VB: Could you tell me how you came to be a librarian in the first place?

RW: Well, it's not completely clear to me, but there are some signs that are indicative. I started working as a library page when I was fourteen. I worked in a branch of the Kansas

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